NCA
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LARRY FREUND/BUCHAREST

ROMANIA'S POPULATION: MORE IS BETTER

ANNCR:

GOVERNMENT AND PARTY LEADERS IN ROMANIA DECLARED RECENTLY THAT THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH THE COUNTRY'S CONTINUED POPULATION GROWTH, AND ECONOMIC PLANNERS IN BUCHAREST SAY THEY HOPE TO KEEP IT THAT WAY FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT QUARTER CENTURY. V-O-A'S CORRESPONDENT LARRY FREUND SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM BUCHAREST.

VOICE:

AS IN NEARLY ALL OF EASTERN EUROPE, ROMANIA'S OFFICIAL ATTITUDE TOWARD ITS OWN POPULATION GROWTH NOW AND FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IS THAT MORE IS BETTER. WHERE ONCE ABORTIONS WERE EASY TO COME BY AND WERE STATE SUPPORTED, TODAY, THEY ARE ILLEGAL. IN CONTRAST WITH SEVERAL COUNTRIES IN WESTERN EUROPE, THE SANCTIONS AGAINST ABORTION GO UNCHALLENGED AND ARE VIEWED BY ROMANIAN OFFICIALS AS A CORNERSTONE OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ENCOURAGING AN EXPANDED POPULATION. THE LIBERTY TO INTERRUPT PREGNANCY, ONE OFFICIAL DOCUMENT POINTS OUT, MAY SERIOUSLY PREJUDICE THE NATURAL GROWTH OF THE POPULATION. THE SAME DOCUMENT RECALLS THAT LEGAL ABORTION LENIENCY IN ROMANIA LED TO WHAT IT CALLS DEMOGRAPHIC DANGER.

IN THE LATE NINETEEN FIFTIES AND EARLY SIXTIES, ROMANIAN WOMEN TOOK ADVANTAGE OF LOOSE ABORTION LAWS, AND THE NATIONAL BIRTH RATE DROPPED SHARPLY. NOW THAT THE SITUATION HAS BEEN REVERSED, ILLEGAL ABORTIONS IN ROMANIA ARE SAID TO BE BOTH AVAILABLE AND RAMPANT. NEVERTHELESS, THE NEW,

TIGHT RESTRICTIONS ON LEGAL ABORTIONS, AS THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FROM THE EARLY NINETEEN SIXTIES, HAVE HELPED INCREASE ROMANIA'S POPULATION BY ABOUT ONE PER CENT A YEAR -- OVER TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE.

BUT THE ANTI-ABORTION RULES HAVE BEEN ONLY ONE FACTOR IN ROMANIA'S EXPANDING POPULATION. ANOTHER IS THE GENERAL UNAVAILABILITY OF MODERN FAMILY PLANNING METHODS. A BUCHAREST CLINIC DIRECTOR SAYS WOMEN CAN RECEIVE BIRTH CONTROL DEVICES FREE, BUT ONLY IF THEY ALREADY HAVE FOUR CHILDREN, ARE OLDER THAN FORTY, OR HAVE A GOOD MEDICAL REASON TO AVOID PREGNANCY. THE PILL IS GENERALLY UNAVAILABLE, AND SAYS ONE FOREIGN RESIDENT, ON THE BUCHAREST BLACK MARKET, CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES ARE SECOND ONLY TO BLUE JEANS.

FINALLY, THERE IS A POSITIVE CAMPAIGN IN ROMANIA TO ENCOURAGE LARGER FAMILIES, PARTICULARLY IN URBAN, EDUCATED AREAS WHERE, AS ELSEWHERE, FAMILY SIZE TENDS TO SHRINK COMPARED TO RURAL DISTRICTS. THIS CAMPAIGN INCLUDES EXPANDED FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AS WELL AS A WEEKLY TELEVISION PROGRAM ON THE FAMILY WHICH EXPLORES PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF FAMILY LIFE. THE FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC DIRECTOR SAYS HIS STAFF HAS TO PUT IN A GOOD DEAL OF WORK EXPLAINING TO WOMEN WHY THEY SHOULD HAVE CHILDREN.

ROMANIA'S NATIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC COMMISSION COORDINATES THE COUNTRY'S POPULATION POLICIES. ITS HEADQUARTERS ARE LOCATED JUST A SHORT WALK FROM THE SITE OF THE WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE HELD IN BUCHAREST NEARLY TWO YEARS AGO. OFFICIALS AT THE COMMISSION JUSTIFY THEIR POLICIES IN TERMS OF NATIONAL AIMS ARGUING THAT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT POPULATION GROWTH. THEY POINT TO THE

RECENT JOINT COMMUNIQUE BY ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND PARTY LEADERS EXPRESSING SATISFACTION WITH THE COUNTRY'S CURRENT POPULATION GROWTH. AND THEY ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE COUNTRY WILL REACH THE THIRTY MILLION TARGET BY THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND.

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